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ABSTRACT

Common reasons that young people choose to carry firearms outside of school--protection, intimidation of others, or to be like their peers--are the same reasons they carry guns into the school. This fact sheet presents statistics regarding the prevalence of firearms amongst students in American schools, including: shooting fatalities and woundings on school grounds; number of guns confiscated in California schools; frequency of students bringing guns into school; and students' feelings of fear while at school. The effectiveness of metal detectors and automatic expulsion policies are briefly discussed. (RB)

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Firearm Facts

GUNS IN SCHOOLS

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Schools mirror their communities. Teenagers carry guns outside of school because they think they offer protection, to intimidate others, or to be like their peers. They bring them into school for the same reasons. An argument between armed students may be resolved by a gunfight rather than a fistfight. The presence of guns in classrooms generates fear, not learning.

From 1986 to 1990, at least 65 students were shot to death and 186 were wounded on school grounds.[1]
From 1986 to 1990, 10,052 children ages 15–19 years were murdered with guns in America, and an additional 9,213 died from firearm-related suicides or unintentional shootings.[2] Some of that violence is spilling over into the schools.

The number of guns confiscated in California public schools doubled from 1985 to 1988. High schools experienced the greatest increase, but more guns were found at all grade levels, including elementary school.[3]

In a national survey in 1987, one of every 36 tenth grade boys said they had carried a handgun to school in the past year.[4] One in every 100 boys brought that gun to school nearly every day. In one U.S. city, one out of every 15 eleventh grade boys has carried a handgun to school at some point.[5]
Most of the students who carry guns to school say that they do so for protection on their way to and from school. On any given day, the odds are that at least one of the students in any urban high school classroom is carrying a gun.

In one U.S. city, half of eleventh grade students who owned handguns said they got the gun from their parents or from friends. Students who said they could easily obtain a handgun were most likely to get the guns from friends, rather than on the street.[5]

In a survey of ten high schools in four states, 15% of inner-city high school students said they were scared at school almost all of the time.[6]
However, according to a survey in one city, inner-city students generally feel safer in school than they do in their own neighborhoods.[7]

Metal detectors are increasingly a response to the problem of guns in schools.
Students at one New York City high school appreciate the school's use of metal detectors, "both for protection from classmates' weapons and . . . for the extra personal attention they received during security checks."[8] The actual effectiveness of metal detectors as a deterrent to carrying weapons has not been adequately determined.

In some school districts, students who are caught carrying guns on campus are immediately expelled.
Although intended to discourage gun carrying and protect the student body and school staff, expulsion alone will not solve the societal problem of guns in

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school. Uprooting a gun-carrying student and placing him or her in another school or forcing them out on the street may simply make them more unstable and endanger a new population of children.

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Children's Safety Network

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